

SPEECH

OF

HENRY CLAY, OF KENTUCKY,

IN REFERENCE TO

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH AUSTRIA.

DELIVERED IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES, JANUARY 7, 1850.

The resolution of Mr. CASS being under consideration, Mr. CLAY addressed the Senate as follows:

The appeal, sir, which was made the other day by the honorable Senator from Michigan to me, to aid him in sustaining the proposition which he has thought proper to submit, entitles him, from the great respect I bear him, arising from the long acquaintance that has subsisted between us, to a response. My worthy friend expressed a very confident expectation that I would succor him, and support the resolution that he has submitted on this occasion.

Mr. KING. Will the honorable Senator, as the hour is late, permit me to move an adjournment?

Mr. CLAY. I am under the order of the Senate, and am very thankful to the honorable gentleman from Alabama for the kindness which prompted the motion; but, as I am upon the floor, I will say a few words.

The honorable Senator from Michigan was pleased to express, in very confident language, his expectation of my support on this occasion. He expressed in still stronger language his confident anticipation of the support of the American people; and he will excuse me for saying that, there being these two sources of gratification to him, I think the latter will be admitted to be much more agreeable to him than the former—much more available than the gratification to be afforded by any aid or assistance that I could render in the passage of the resolution that he has proposed.

Sir, the proposition which he has submitted to us for consideration, whether in its original form or upon the amendment which is proposed to it, is a grave and serious proposition, as all propositions are that are connected with the foreign affairs of this country. The proposition is, that the Committee on Foreign Affairs be instructed to inquire into the expediency of suspending diplomatic relations with Austria. The worthy member in front of me (Mr. HALE) proposes to comprehend Russia also. It proposes the inquiries not merely in reference to any representative of this country in Austria, nor in respect to any representative of Austria in this country. It proposes not the recall of a minister of our own, but it accomplishes not only his recall, but the sending out of the country the minister of Austria who is here.

Sir, it is very true it is put in the shape of an inquiry; and why was it put in that shape? It is not like the ordinary case of a private or local

matter, in which the Senate cannot be presumed to be in possession of all facts connected with the case—in which it may be expedient, in order to ascertain them, to refer the matter to a committee for investigation, and have a report made by that committee to the Senate. All the facts upon which the honorable Senator bases his proposition are, in their nature, historical. They relate to the war conducted by Austria against Hungary, to the rights of Hungary as an independent and integral portion of that empire, to the manner in which the war was conducted, to the manner in which punishments have been inflicted upon those who unfortunately fell within the power of Austria. All these, sir, are matters of an historical nature, not requiring the investigation of a committee. They are known to the Senate; and it is my humble opinion that the proposition which is now before us ought to be presented as if it were a direct and positive requirement of the suspension of diplomatic intercourse with Austria. Sir, I have great confidence in the members of the committee to which it is proposed to address this inquiry; I should have been extremely glad to have heard from my honorable friend from Alabama, and to have known whether, in his mature and experienced judgment, in his superior knowledge of all matters connected with our foreign relations, the proposition now under consideration does or does not meet his approbation. I should be greatly disappointed if he had given to it any previous, or would bestow upon it any subsequent concurrence. But, sir, though I have the greatest confidence in him and the other gentlemen of the committee, I think he will concur with me in supposing that it is not a fit subject of inquiry by a committee. The facts are national; they are historical; they are known to the whole world, and we are just as much prepared now to say whether diplomatic intercourse should be suspended with Austria and Russia—for Russia, too, is named—as we shall be after the most elaborate report that can be prepared, after the most laborious research by the Committee of Foreign Affairs.

Sir, I think that the question ought to be treated as if it were a direct proposition to suspend diplomatic intercourse with the Power indicated in the original resolution. And, sir, I have been at first very much struck with the want of sympathy between the premises and conclusion of the honorable Senator from Michigan. In his premises he depicted the enormities of Austrian despotism. Who doubts the perpetration of those enormities? In the most glowing strains of eloquence he portrayed to us the wrongs of suffering Hungary. Who doubts them? He speaks of the atrocious executions committed by her—the disgrace of the age, and, above all, of Austria. Who doubts it? These were the premises of the honorable Senator; but what was his conclusion? It was requiring the recall of a little Chargé d’Affaires that we happen to have at Vienna. Why, the natural conclusion would be, to declare war immediately against Austria, if she had committed such enormities; though, from the impossibility of coming in contact with her, this resource might be difficult of accomplishment. But, sir, there is another mode that is much more congenial, much more compatible with the course we ought to take. The exiles from suffering and bleeding Hungary are now scattered through all quarters of the globe; some have reached our hospitable shores, some are now wending their way hither,

and many are scattered throughout Europe. Let the honorable Senator bring forward some original plan for affording succor and relief to the exiles of Hungary—something that shall be worthy of their acceptance, and the bestowing of which, upon a brave and generous people, shall do honor to a country rich in boundless resources—something that shall be worthy of a country which is the asylum of the wretched and oppressed from all quarters of the world—something that shall be worthy the acceptance of the gallantry and patriotism with which those exiles fought in defence of their own country. When the honorable Senator shall have done this, then he may call on me, and call not in vain, for succor and support in behalf of a proposition such as I have indicated.

Why, sir, great is the incongruity between the premises of the honorable Senator and his conclusion. To recall our *Chargé d’Affaires*! Sir, I think, instead of pursuing that course, by which we shall close the door of intercourse with Austria—by which we shall gain nothing in behalf of the suffering Hungarians, and the suffering exiles from Hungary—a very different course, indeed, would have been the one that ought to have been suggested by the honorable Senator. Instead of suspending our diplomatic intercourse, I would have sent from this country some eminent, and distinguished, and enlightened citizen, some one who possessed the confidence of the country—the honorable Senator himself would have been a very fit and suitable representative on such an interesting occasion—I would have sent him to the Court of Austria, to plead the noble cause of the Hungarians; and if she would not open her ears to the dictates of humanity, which might be infused into her through an agent such as I have described, I would have instructed him to remonstrate, in the name of suffering humanity—in the name of Christianity—to rebuke her for her inhumanity.

The honorable Senator, among the other documents which he adduced on the occasion of his interesting address, referred to what had been proposed, by eighty-three members of the British Parliament, to Lord John Russell and to Lord Palmerston. What did they propose? To stop intercourse—to deny to the British Government any access to Austria—to recall, in a moment of resentment and passion, the minister who represented them at the Court of Vienna? No, sir, no. The requisition of these members of the British Parliament, consisting of Lords and Commons, was that Austria should settle the question between herself and Hungary upon some grounds that would be satisfactory to both—to suspend the atrocious executions of the victims that had fallen into their power. In short, the course proposed by the eighty-three members of the British Parliament, was to keep open the door, and not to suspend all intercourse with Austria. But, sir, to look a little further into this subject, we naturally inquire, what is the object of a foreign minister? The honorable Senator from Michigan does not propose, as some of the writers in the beginning of this century did, to do away with ambassadors altogether, regarding them only as a sort of privileged spy in a foreign country. He does not contend that there is no occasion, under certain circumstances, of maintaining intercourse with Austria. He puts it on none of these grounds. He puts it on the sole ground of Austrian tyranny—Austrian excesses—Austrian butchery—Austrian disregard of Hungarian liberty. What, sir, do we send a minister

abroad for the sake of the country to which the minister is deputed? I take it to be for American interest that he goes and resides abroad; that it is to take care of our commercial affairs; to take care of our seamen; to see that the treaties existing between those countries and ours are faithfully observed and executed. These are some of the duties that appertain to a foreign minister. We are asked, then, by the honorable Senator from Michigan, by way of punishing Austria for her harshness and ill-usage towards the Hungarians, to punish ourselves—to deprive our merchants, and the sailors of our country, of what benefits might redound from having a minister resident at Vienna.

Sir, my worthy friend from Michigan, among the considerations which he seemed to think entitled him to expect my support, did me the honor to quote what I have said on a former occasion, and particularly upon the occasion of a proposition made by me for the recognition of South American independence—the independence of the Spanish American States. The gentleman seems to think that the course which I marked out for myself on that occasion, necessarily calls upon me to coöperate with him upon this. Sir, what was that occasion? It was the bringing of a nation into existence, or rather—for that is putting it entirely in too presumptuous a form—the object was to introduce into the family of nations those who had been gallantly and gloriously establishing their independence. The proposition here is not to introduce a new nation into the family of nations, but it is to blot out of existence a nation, so far as we can do it by a withdrawal of our diplomatic intercourse—it is to blot out of existence, so far as this suspension of intercourse can accomplish it, an ancient nation. My effort on that occasion was to send a minister abroad, to recognise, to acknowledge, the Powers newly sprung into existence in the Spanish dominions, on the coast of South America. The proposition now made is not to send a minister abroad at all, but to bring a minister home. Sir, there would have been some analogy between the case in which I uttered the sentiments which the honorable Senator has been pleased to quote, and the present, if Hungary had maintained her independence—if the Hungarians were still fighting and struggling for their liberty; and I confess, that, looking upon that struggle with all the interest that could be felt by any man in this Republic, I did hope that Hungary would have been able to maintain herself throughout the past year; and, if she had done so, I believe that the sympathies of Europe and of the world would have been so excited in her behalf, as, perhaps, to have obtained for her some more substantial and advantageous succor and aid, than that of calling from the Court of Austria a *Chargé d’Affaires* whom we have sent there.

Sir, unfortunately, owing to causes upon which it is not necessary for me now to dwell, some of them of a very painful nature—among which are charges against the commander-in-chief of the Hungarian army, which, if well-founded, must cover him with infamy—unfortunately, Hungary fell suddenly, and to the surprise of the American world. She is subdued; she is crushed.

Now, if we adopt this resolution, I have been curious to satisfy myself upon what principle we can vindicate it. What principle does it involve? It involves the principle of assuming on the part of this Government a right to pass judgment upon the conduct of foreign Powers—

a branch of the subject that has been well treated of by the Senator who sits before me, (Mr. HALE.) Have we any such power? The most extensive bearing of the principle involved in the resolution proposed by the honorable Senator from Michigan, assumes the right, on the part of this nation, to pronounce upon the conduct of all other nations, and to follow it up by some direct action, such as the suspending intercourse. We are directing, at present, the exercise of that power towards a nation on account of the manner in which they have conducted a war, or of the manner in which they have treated the unfortunate prisoners who were taken during the progress of that war. But where is to be the limit? You begin with war. You may extend the same principle of action to politics or religion; to society, or to social principles and habits.

The honorable Senator before me, (Mr. HALE,) has spoken of the conduct of Russia; and, undoubtedly, as between Russia and Austria, I consider Russia as the most culpable. It is true, she had a pretext for her interference. She was afraid of the contagion of liberty in Hungary, lest it might affect her coterminous possessions. That was the pretext for her interference. In the case, however, of Austria, though I think Hungary was right and Austria wrong, in respect to the cause and object of the war, still there were relations existing between Hungary and Austria, which did not exist between Hungary and Russia. Russia's interference, then, was voluntary, spontaneous, uncalled-for. She had no such pretext or ground for it as Austria had, in endeavoring to subjugate those whom she was pleased to call rebellious subjects; and yet the honorable Senator has permitted Russia to pass—and, by-the-by, allow me to say, that but for the interference of Russia, Hungary would have succeeded. She had succeeded, and she would eventually have triumphed in the struggle with Austria. The honorable Senator, instead of directing his proposition against Russia, as I would have done, directs it against Austria, the least offending Power of the two, and proposes to pass Russia by unnoticed. But, if the principle contained in the proposition be true, we have a right to examine into the conduct of Russia, and into that of other nations. Where, then, is the limit? You may extend it to religion. You may extend it to the inquisition. Have we not an equal right to say to Spain, unless you abolish the inquisition we will suspend diplomatic intercourse with you? The honorable Senator stated that he had visited Constantinople twelve years ago; that he saw there the present Sultan, surrounded by all the pride, pomp, and circumstance of Oriental power. He saw him crossing the Bosphorus. Sir, the honorable Senator went to that country under distinguished auspices. I would be glad to know whether he saw any portion of the palace, or whether he was limited to a sight of the young prince who is now sitting upon the throne? The Turks have very peculiar notions. I know there are apartments in the palace in which no vulgar foot has intruded, which no vulgar eye has ever beheld.

Mr. CASS. I did not distinctly hear the question of the honorable Senator.

Mr. CLAY. The question was, whether my worthy friend had visited certain apartments of the palace of the Sultan?

Mr. CASS. The honorable Senator will allow me to say that in that capacity I will yield to him. [Laughter.]

Mr. CLAY. If I had been there—if I had been placed in the advantageous circumstances in which the honorable Senator was placed, I think it likely I should have had an opportunity of inspecting every portion of the palace that I desired to see. The honorable gentleman went there, not in the capacity of a minister to that Court; but he was then a Minister at the Court of France, and was conveyed in a public vessel. I have no doubt, if he desired to do so, he could have answered the question which I wanted to put to him—that is, how many wives had his young friend, the Sultan? [Laughter.]

Mr. CASS. That is a question which the honorable Senator from Kentucky is doubtless much more capable of answering than I am. [Renewed laughter.]

Mr. CLAY. I am very sorry I cannot obtain a specific reply from the gentleman. I have adverted to this to show, that if we adopt the principle which is embraced in the resolution of the honorable Senator from Michigan, there is no limit or restriction as to the extent to which we may go in our investigations of the conduct of foreign nations, and as to the extent we may go in pronouncing judgment upon that conduct. We may say, in reference to Turkey: Your religion tolerates polygamy; unless you change your religion, and your habits of social life, we will cease all intercourse with you. Where, I appeal to the gentleman to say, is to be the limit, if we undertake to pronounce judgment upon the conduct of nations, and to regulate our intercourse with them according to the estimate that we may form of their conduct?

But I have spoken of the more broad and obvious tendency of the principle embraced in the resolution. It contains one that is, in my judgment, of a still more questionable nature, and that is, the assumption of the right of interference in the internal affairs of foreign nations. Now, sir, although Hungary was entitled, as an independent Government, to direct her domestic concerns, there nevertheless existed a political connection between Hungary and Austria. The House of Hapsburg were the lawful sovereigns, the more especially as they were originally elected by Hungary. A distinction should be drawn between the case when a civil war exists in a foreign country and when the war has terminated. The present is a very different case from that where a war is still pending, and where there is a government capable of exercising a sovereign power. There is a wide difference between the present case and a case of that kind. Where a Government exists, we have a right to recognize that Government, and to institute diplomatic relations with that Government; but the case in which the honorable Senator invites us to interfere is a case where independence has been lost. He does not regret more than I do—no one on earth regrets more than I do, that the independence of Hungary has been destroyed, has been crushed by a union of Russian and Austrian power; laid, to use the language of one of the documents referred to by the honorable Senator, bleeding at the feet of Russia. The war is at an end; Hungarian liberty is destroyed. There is no Hungarian Power which we can recognize. We are called upon, then, by the honorable Senator, to interfere with the government of the internal concerns of a foreign nation—

to interfere between Austria and a portion of her empire ; and we are called upon to do this, in direct contradiction to the whole policy of this Government, first laid down by Washington, and pursued by every successor he has had down to the present day. And, sir, if we were to permit ourselves to interfere in cases of this kind, where, again I ask, are we to stop? Why should we not interfere in behalf of suffering Ireland? Why not interfere in behalf of suffering humanity wherever we may find it? Why not interfere in all the cases enumerated by the gentleman from New Hampshire, and particularly in the case of Rome, as suggested by that honorable Senator? I do say, without meaning to disparage in the slightest degree Hungarian valor, that in no quarter of the world, considering the difference in numbers engaged in the contest between France and Rome, was there more gallantry and heroism displayed than in the contest, for a long time a doubtful contest, that was carried on by Rome in repelling the invasion of the French. It was said by the enemies of Rome that they were divided. But every manifestation, every particle of evidence that reached me on the subject, demonstrated that no people were ever more firmly united in repelling the invasion of an enemy than the people of Rome in the establishment of that Revolution which French power and French intervention suppressed. Sir, if we are to become the defenders of nations, the censurers of other Powers, I again ask the honorable Senator where are we to stop, and why does he confine himself to Austria alone?

Mr. President, the honorable Senator admitted that he entertained an apprehension that I was one of those stationary politicians, who refuse to advance as the age advances; one of those politicians, I think his expression was, that stand still; that he was in favor of progress; in favor of going ahead. Sir, I should like to understand the meaning of this word progress, of which the honorable Senator speaks. I should like to hear a definition of it. Has not this nation progressed with most astonishing rapidity in point of population? Has it not by far exceeded in this respect every other nation in the world? Has it not progressed in commerce and manufactures? Has it not increased in power with a rapidity greater than has ever been known before in the case of any nation under the sun? What is the progress that the honorable Senator means? I am afraid that it is not an internal progress he is in favor of; for, whatever his own peculiar opinions may be, the school of which he is a distinguished disciple is opposed, as I understand, to the improvement of our magnificent harbors and rivers, of our glorious water-courses throughout the country. That is not the progress, I apprehend, which the honorable Senator is in favor of. And, again, with respect to the manufactures of the country: I do not understand the doctrines of the party to which the honorable Senator belongs to be in favor of progress there. They are for arresting progress. Their progress is backward in reference to these matters; not intentionally so, I admit, but by the course of their policy they carry us back to the colonial days, when we depended upon Great Britain for everything in the way of supplies that were necessary to existence.

What, then, is the progress which the honorable Senator seems so desirous of making? Ah, I am afraid it is progress in foreign wars. I am afraid it is progress in foreign conquest—in territorial aggrandize-

ment. I am afraid it is progress as the disturbers of the possessions of our neighbors throughout this continent, and throughout the islands adjacent to it. If that be the progress which the honorable Senator wishes to effect, I trust that it will be long before this country engages in any such object as that; at least, at the expense of the peaceable portion of the world.

Sir, the gentleman says—what we all know—that this is a great country, a vast country; great in fact, and will be still greater in future, if we conduct things with prudence, discretion, and wisdom; but that very greatness draws after it great responsibilities, and those responsibilities should incline us to use the vast power with which we have been blessed by the kindness of Providence, so as to promote justice, so as to avoid unnecessary wars, maintaining our own rights with firmness, but invading the rights of no others. We should be content with the almost limitless extent of territory which we now possess, stretching from ocean to ocean, containing millions upon millions of acres as yet uninhabited.

Sir, if the progress which the honorable Senator means, is a progress to be accomplished by foreign wars, and foreign conquest, and foreign territorial aggrandizement, I thank God that I belong to the party which is stationary, which is standing still. If that is not his object, I would like to know what he means by progress. I should like to meet with a definition of the kind of progress which he thinks it is desirable for this country to make.

Mr. President, I have risen late in the evening, really intending to say much less than I have said, and I must conclude by expressing the hope that the Senate of the United States, when they come to deliberate seriously upon the consequence of the adoption of such a resolution as this, will pause; that they will not open a new field of collision, terminating perhaps, in war, and exposing ourselves to the reaction of foreign Powers, who, when they see us assuming to judge of their conduct, will undertake in their turn to judge of our conduct. We ought to recollect that, with the sole exception of France, whose condition is yet somewhat obscured in doubt and uncertainty as to the fate of a republic which she has established, we stand the leading Republic amidst all the Powers of the earth, an example of a free Government, and that we should not venture to give to other nations even a pretext, much less cause to separate themselves from us, by undertaking to judge of their conduct, and applying to them a rule according to which we may denationalize nation after nation, according as their conduct may be found to correspond with our notion and judgment, of what is right and proper in the administration of human affairs. Sir, it does not become us to take such perilous and unnecessary grounds, and I trust that we shall not adopt such a course. I see no necessity for referring this resolution to a committee.

I think it would be unwise to adopt it; and I trust that the Senate will at once negative the resolution; or, if it should be referred, confiding in the sound judgment of the Committee on Foreign Relations in anticipation, I feel perfectly sure of the rejection of the resolution by the committee.